

Song of Myself by LostInAdmiration

Category: IT (Movies - Muschietti), IT - Stephen King

Genre: Canon Compliant, Childhood Friends, Fluff, Friends to Lovers, M/M, Mild Gore, Mutual Pining, Poetry, Sonia Kaspbrak's A+ Parenting, except no one dies in this house, mostly!

Language: English

Characters: Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Mike Hanlon, Richie Tozier, Stanley Uris

Relationships: Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier

Status: Completed

Published: 2019-12-01

Updated: 2019-12-01

Packaged: 2019-12-19 02:02:17

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 11,510

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

What will your verse be?

Eddie was never good with words. When he was younger his mother would speak for him, putting her feelings in his mouth before he'd even have a chance to think about it. Now he was older he often talked too fast to keep up with himself, his thoughts flooding out unbidden around his friends before he had to rein that stream back in once he went home again. He supposed he hadn't quite figured out his voice yet; his words always too fast or not there at all.

Eddie didn't understand, but he thought he might want to learn.

-

Or: Eddie discovers his new favourite film, and finds out he kind of likes poetry, too.

Song of Myself

Author's Note:

So I saw this [wonderful piece of art](#) to do with Eddie watching Dead Poets Society, and then me and my pal Lyds spent a solid few hours talking about it, which then spanned into a discussion of Eddie loving poetry and spiralled real fast into me writing this.

You don't have to have seen DPS to read this, but there are spoilers for the film if you haven't seen it and want to.

Warnings for brief mentions of suicide (because of the movie), some very mild gore, and a very small amount of period typical homophobia.

Big thank you to my favourite poem nerd [lyds](#) who came up with no less than 20 Eddie-centric poems. Any inaccuracies are completely my fault because I'm a poem rookie and also bad with timelines

Fall, 1989.

He saw the trailer one night when his mother let him stay up late to watch Days of Our Lives with her. She'd figured it was a good exchange for not letting Eddie go to Bill's that afternoon, even though he hated soap operas and hated being trapped in with his mother on a Saturday night even more. But he stayed quiet, because he was desperate to get to the clubhouse tomorrow, and he knew that he had to compromise somewhere. He still had the big clunky cast on his arm, was still being forced along to doctors appointments for more check ups than he needed, and his mother was even more unbelievably paranoid than normal. It had been four months since he and his friends had faced their worst fears at Neibolt and somehow gotten out of there alive, and it was almost scary how quickly things had gotten back to normal, considering how Eddie felt like his whole

world had been flipped upside down.

Eddie's mother had him on complete house arrest for a week after that day, and at first Eddie was in too much pain and too scared to even argue. But he missed his friends, he *needed* them. He was still reeling from the realisation his mother had been lying to him for so long, and he craved to be around the only people he knew would never lie to him. He was still furious with his mother and she knew as much, knew that he had the upper hand in their game. Despite everything she'd done, Eddie still managed to feel a little bit guilty for being so delighted at the way she was tiptoeing so cautiously around him now, almost scared of him. He still played it carefully though, knowing when to pick his battles to keep his mother happy - after all, he knew she was an expert at getting him to do what she wanted anyway - and tonight was one fight he'd given up to avoid her having a meltdown.

As he sat and stared glumly at nothing, absentmindedly tracing his finger across the coarse cast on his arm that still smelled a little no matter how many times he'd tried to scrub it away with a toothbrush, the commercials started. *"Dare to walk a new path,"* came a voice from the television that Eddie recognised. It was the guy from that dumb comedy show Richie loved that Eddie wasn't allowed to watch. Richie had recorded it for Eddie a few times, and when they watched it together Richie spent the whole time talking over it, trying to copy the impressions and laughing at the jokes before the punchline came.

Eddie wasn't actually sure why the movie trailer interested him so much, since his taste in films started and ended with whatever the other Losers dragged him to see every other Friday night, but Eddie leaned forward in his seat anyway, frowning at the screen.

"Poetry, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for," it said, and something in Eddie's chest tightened. He jumped when his mother changed back to the sales channels, scoffing and rolling her eyes.

"Absolute nonsense," she muttered. "Love doesn't pay the bills, does it?" Eddie didn't know if she was asking him or just ranting to herself, but he nodded anyway, just in case.

*

The next day at the clubhouse, Eddie asked his friends if they'd heard of it.

"Dead poets?" Richie said, scrunching his face up, before something dawned on him and he grinned. "Is it about zombies?"

"No, dumbass, it isn't about zombies," Eddie said, rolling his eyes and trying hard not to smile as Richie staggered around the clubhouse doing his best impression of a zombie with his arms outstretched, groaning about brains.

"Oh! I saw the trailer," Ben piped up, right as Richie stumbled over to Eddie and started pawing at his head. "The one about the school?"

Richie stopped pretending to chew on Eddie's ear to frown. "It's about a school? That sounds boring," he said, and Bev hummed an agreement.

"I saw the trailer too, I thought it looked *super* boring," she groaned, earning a high five from Richie.

"It's not about a school, I think it's about poetry," Stan mused, and Richie made a fart noise, making Bev snigger.

"That's even worse," he complained, as if it were a personal insult to him, flopping himself down on the floor in between Eddie and Bill.

Eddie curled up on himself a little bit, feeling stupid for bringing it up. He didn't know why this film had made something spark up in the back of his head that he couldn't scratch away, but he thought his friends might have understood. They'd always been so good at helping translate Eddie's feelings for him when he couldn't in the past.

Bill seemed to notice, because he reached out and squeezed Eddie's ankle gently. His hand was still bandaged up, the wounds they had all dug into each other's palms still raw and fresh despite plenty of time passing. Stan's bandages on his face were gone now, only pale

red scars left behind, but the ones on their hands seemed to struggle to close; Eddie tried not to think too hard about why that was.

“D-d-don’t pretend you’re a m-movie snob now, Richie. We all know your f-favourite film is St. Elmo’s F-f-fire,” Bill said, smiling slyly and making Eddie laugh when Richie made a loud noise of protest, throwing his hands over his face.

“No it *isn’t*. I just thought it had a cool soundtrack!” he protested.

Eddie nudged Richie in the ribs, still laughing. “You cried at the end and insisted you wanted to learn to play the saxophone so you could be more like Rob Lowe,” he teased.

Stan looked around to Eddie, seeming absolutely delighted at the prospect of getting to make fun of Richie. “Didn’t he wear a bandana around his head for a while because of that film too?” he asked.

Richie reached behind Eddie’s back to tug on Stan’s curls. “Fuck you Stanley, I looked cool,” he protested.

“No you didn’t,” Bev said.

“You kept getting your stupid glasses stuck in the bandana,” Stan pointed out.

“You d-didn’t even know h-h-how to tie it p-properly,” Bill added.

Eddie laughed loudly along with the others as Mike leant forward to pat Richie sympathetically on the shoulder whilst Richie flipped them all off, glaring. Eddie had thought Richie looked pretty cool secretly, even though he kept tucking his socks into his pants, but he would never tell Richie that.

When they all piled out to go home - everyone still moved as a group even now, though they were sure the threat was gone they’d learned the hard way not to split up - Ben tugged on Eddie’s sleeve.

“I could go with you to see that movie,” he offered, voice lilting up into a question. “If you wanted to?”

Eddie thought about his mother’s scoffing, his other friends making

faces about it, and he almost shook his head. But then he thought about that weird feeling he got when he'd seen the trailer, and he nodded.

"I'd like that," he said, bumping into Ben's shoulder. "Just don't tell Bev or Richie."

Ben grinned and nodded, tapping his nose, right as Richie came over and wiggled his way between Ben and Eddie, slinging his arms over each of their shoulders.

"What are you two rascals talking about?" he asked in a voice Eddie didn't recognise, but that made him laugh anyway.

"None of your business," Eddie replied, wriggling out from under Richie's arm and walking ahead whilst Ben just blushed and shrugged apologetically because he was a terrible liar.

Richie chased after Eddie, quickly forgetting about missing out on Eddie and Ben's conversation as he excitedly started to tell Eddie about the newest comics he'd gotten, promising he'd bring them over.

"Only you're allowed to borrow them though," Richie said, making a sour face. "I only trust you with my new comics."

Something warm swelled up in Eddie's chest and pushed his face up into a grin as Richie kept on chatting away, like a sting of pride mixed with something a little sweeter. Richie was waving his arms around wildly and switching between voices so quickly that his own voice cracked, making Eddie laugh even harder than the voices did, and the warmth stayed with him for the whole walk home.

*

The movie was better than Eddie even thought it would be, but if anyone would have asked him why, he didn't think he could ever explain. It set off a tsunami of feelings instead of him that felt too big, too much for his body, and Eddie didn't know what to do with it

all.

He'd been terrified the others had been right at first, with the slow beginning and too many characters being introduced at once that Eddie couldn't keep track of. But he started to pay a little more attention when both he and Ben sniggered along with the boys on the film as their new teacher cracked jokes that reminded Eddie of the dumb jokes Richie made to make his friends smile.

He didn't understand what the man was talking about when he recited verses from a poem Eddie had never read. He looked over to Ben to see if he was just as confused, but Ben was all shiny eyed, jaw slack as he nodded along, and Eddie crossed his arms across his chest, slumping down.

What will your verse be?

Eddie was never good with words. When he was younger his mother would speak for him, putting her feelings in his mouth before he'd even have a chance to think about it. Now he was older he often talked too fast to keep up with himself, his thoughts flooding out unbidden around his friends before he had to rein that stream back in once he went home again. He supposed he hadn't quite figured out his voice yet; his words always too fast or not there at all.

Eddie didn't understand, but he thought he might want to learn.

Ben, however, almost looked like he wanted to take notes, and Eddie smiled fondly. He'd seen Ben scribbling away in notebooks all of the time, sometimes catching a glimpse of sketches, sometimes of scrawled out words. Ben was quiet, but almost everything he said was carefully constructed, soft but sure and nothing like Eddie's quick moving, sour words. Eddie thought he kind of envied Ben, even though he knew that was a stupid thing to think.

A sharp lump formed in Eddie's throat whenever Neil spoke to his father on the screen, something cold and itching settling across his skin, and when Neil's parents found his body, Eddie couldn't breathe. Ben was crying beside him, softly with his sweater sleeves pulled over his knuckles to cover his eyes, but Eddie just felt scared. It was the same kind of fear he'd felt in Neibolt, the kind that made his

whole body shudder and head swim. Eddie curled his hands into fists, counting to ten and back again, focusing on the sting of his nails digging into his palm. It was ridiculous to feel so afraid, especially when Eddie had nothing to be afraid of, not now. But fear shook through him anyway, it only easing up and giving way to anger as the academy tried to find its scapegoat.

The end made Eddie's heart feel like it was going to burst, and both he and Ben turned to grin at each other when the lights came on. It wasn't like the dumb horror movies Eddie loved or the comedies Richie dragged him to see, or even the romantic ones he and Bev and Stan went to in secret. It was one he knew his mother would hate - even more than the horrors - and one he never wanted her to see, never wanted to hear her opinion on it.

Ben listened patiently whilst Eddie chattered away on their way out of the theatre, bouncing on his heels as his words stumbled over each other in a rush to get out.

"The teacher was so cool! He was like Richie with the jokes but *way* cooler, and he was smart, too. Maybe I could be a teacher," Eddie mused, thoughts breaking off into too many tangents to keep track off.

"You'd be a good teacher," Ben said kindly, but Eddie shook that particular thought off as soon as it came.

"Nah. I don't think I'm smart enough. *You'd* be a good teacher, though," Eddie nudged into Ben's side and made him duck his head and mumble a thanks.

"Do you like poetry, Eddie?" Ben asked. They were walking home together, since Eddie still couldn't ride his bike with a broken arm, and since for now they were free from monsters - human or otherwise - trying to hunt them down.

Eddie shrugged. "Dunno, never read any. I suppose I liked the poems in the movie," he mumbled. His mother had told him poetry was nonsense, something only queer folk like, and even just the memory made Eddie flinch. It was the way she sneered when she talked about some things that made Eddie shy away from them without even

really thinking about it. She'd be unable to hide her disgust, like a terrible taste in her mouth, and Eddie always figured whatever it was must be truly awful for her to hate it that much.

There were a lot of things Eddie's mother hated, and in turn a lot of things Eddie was afraid of.

Ben hummed. "Whitman is good, but Elizabeth Barrett Browning is better, I think. There's a lot of girl poets who are really cool too."

When Ben spoke about poetry, he smiled, face open and bright; the complete opposite of Eddie's mother. So Eddie listened carefully, and when Ben suggested that Eddie could maybe read some for himself, instead of cringing away from it, he nodded.

*

Keeping his promise, Richie showed up at Eddie's one night after lights out with a backpack full of comics and two packs of Razzles he'd promised he'd bring because Eddie's mother wouldn't let him have candy in the house. Richie dumped his backpack on the ground and launched himself onto Eddie's bed with one of the comics, ignoring Eddie's desperate attempts to shush him, and tucked one arm behind his head, holding out the comic to Eddie.

"M'lord," he said grandly, bowing his head when Eddie climbed in next to him and took the comic, rolling his eyes.

He settled in by Richie, holding the comic so they both could see it as they read together. Richie, as usual, read out his favourite lines in ridiculous voices and waited patiently for Eddie - who was always the slowest reader - to finish a page. Eddie was even slower to read than usual because it'd been three days and he still couldn't get the movie he and Ben had seen out of his head. He'd seen Richie get this enamoured with movies before, in a way that made his eyes shine and his whole body jitter like he had too many feelings he couldn't

contain. But this feeling was new to Eddie, and it didn't make any sense.

"I saw the movie," he blurted, right as Richie started to tap on the page to see if Eddie was ready to turn it.

Richie turned to him, face scrunched up into a frown. "What movie?" he muttered, before his expression cleared. "Oh! The zombie movie?"

"It's *not* a zombie movie," Eddie argued, kicking Richie's ankle as he sniggered.

"How was it?" Richie asked, turning himself a little bit more so he could look at Eddie properly.

Richie was a little softer around the edges when it was just the two of them. He was a natural performer, always wanting to make his friends laugh in a way they only laughed when they were with him, and Eddie liked that version of him. But he liked this Richie too, the one who in the dark of Eddie's room didn't feel like he needed to put on so much of a show.

"I loved it," Eddie replied quietly, as if it were a secret he shouldn't be telling.

"More than Ghostbusters?" Richie grinned, making Eddie snort a laugh.

"You can't compare it to Ghostbusters!" Eddie protested, turning himself on his side so that he was facing Richie too.

Richie kept on grinning. "Oh so you're only into boring posh movies now, huh?" he nudged at Eddie's shin with his toe, and Eddie rolled his eyes.

"It's *not* boring, it's just not one of your dumb comedy movies."

"Tell me about it?" asked Richie, grin dropping into a softer smile that still somehow looked just as bright.

Richie shut his eyes as Eddie spoke, but Eddie knew that just meant he was listening as carefully as he could. He'd told Eddie it stopped

him from getting so distracted, though Eddie wasn't sure how well it actually worked, and Eddie tried his best to explain the plot, knowing he couldn't ever describe it properly.

"It has that guy you like in it. The funny one," Eddie said, and Richie's eyes opened again at that.

"Who?"

"The one from the dumb alien show you love."

"Mork and Mindy!" Richie said delightedly, snapping his fingers. "Is he funny in this movie, too?"

Eddie frowned. "I guess" he said. "He still does some impressions, too."

Richie hummed, tapping his chin.

"I wanna see it. Will you come with me?" he said decisively, and Eddie blanched.

"You said it sounded boring before," he argued, and Richie shrugged.

"I know I'm usually always right, but I don't mind being proven wrong sometimes, Eds," he grinned.

"You're *never* right" Eddie muttered, but Richie ignored it.

"And besides, if you like it so much, I bet I'll like it too," he added.

Eddie was sick of feeling things he didn't understand, but his body didn't seem to get that memo. Something brand new bloomed between his ribs, wrapping around his lungs and squeezing so tight Eddie had to wiggle away from Richie ever so slightly just so he could breathe again.

"Alright," he said quietly, hoping his voice didn't sound as strangled as he thought it did. "We can go see it."

Richie nodded, looking pleased, and he opened up their comic again, handing it to Eddie.

“Ready to see who’s gonna win this fight?” he asked, leg bouncing excitedly. “You’re not gonna believe it, it’s so cool.”

Eddie knew Richie had read this comic at least twenty times before bringing it to Eddie, but he still got so excited to see Eddie’s reaction, like he was reading it for the first time all over again.

Eddie matched Richie’s grin and nodded, sitting himself up cross legged with his thigh pressed against Richie’s. He held the comic so that both him and Richie could see, and the vines wrapping around him eased up slightly whenever Richie made him laugh with his dumb voices.

Richie left well into the early hours of the morning, leaving his comics so that Eddie could read them again, but hiding them under the bed so that his mother didn’t find them. Eddie was half asleep as Richie snuck out, and he almost had the ridiculous urge to ask Richie to stay. He still wasn’t sleeping well, still waking up in the middle of the night with his heart racing and tears running down his face, dreaming of glowing eyes and hearing the sickening snap of his arm on repeat.

The Losers didn’t talk about what had happened, and most of the time Eddie was glad, but sometimes he was bursting at the seams with all of the fear he’d been left with, feeling like he needed to get it out or he’d fall to pieces. Richie had stayed a few times in the past few months, and neither of them had talked about it, but having Richie there, solid and warm, made Eddie feel safer, like he could share his nightmares instead of suffer them alone.

He wanted Richie to stay again, but he didn’t want to ask. Instead he shut his eyes and shuffled over to lay on the still warm spot where Richie had been, turning his face away from the window so that he didn’t have to watch Richie leave.

*

Richie had a terrible habit of talking his way through a movie, leaning close to Eddie and whisper-shouting everything he was thinking until someone - usually Stan, who preferred to watch films in complete silence - told him to shut up. Eddie never minded Richie chattering his way through a film because he didn't like the stuffy silence of the theatre, and he knew if the movie was good enough they'd see it plenty of times to cover anything they'd missed anyway.

So when the lights went down and Richie immediately started babbling in Eddie's ear, asking him questions he was too impatient to wait and find out, Eddie smiled to himself. He'd missed this when he watched it with Ben, though he immediately winced at that thought and sent off a silent apology to Ben for being rude. He was glad he watched it with Ben first, but watching it with Richie made it a little more fun.

"Is this a cult, Eds? Are they doing a cult ritual?"

"No, dumbass. It's the school's tradition."

"Oh look, that's like you and your mom!" Richie said a little too loudly when he saw the man passing over bottlefuls of medication for his son. Eddie snorted a laugh and rolled his eyes before pointing at the screen.

"And that guy's like you," he retorted, "born with your foot in your mouth."

Eddie laughed even louder at Richie's fake gasp as he kicked Eddie's ankle, but it was quickly forgotten when Richie got lost in the film, leaning forward so his arms were resting on the seat in front.

Eddie kept watching Richie, watched his face furrow into a frown illuminated by the screen in front of him.

"Wow, this guy is a dick," Richie muttered, jabbing his thumb towards Niel's father, and Eddie nodded enthusiastically, matching Richie's scowl.

Richie's face lit up as Keating came whistling through the classroom, practically bouncing in his seat when he started to make the jokes

Eddie knew he would like.

“This guy is weird,” Richie said, turning to grin at Eddie. “I like him.”

Eddie almost laughed again at how awestruck Richie looked, but he knew he’d looked exactly the same the first time too.

“We should have a cool place to meet up like that,” Richie whispered, nudging Eddie as the boys went into the cave, and Eddie made a face.

“We have the *clubhouse*, dipshit,” he replied dryly, making Richie collapse into fits of laughter.

As Eddie thought he would, Richie copied each of Keating’s impressions immediately after, sparked up with the kind of delight that made him twitch a little, like he couldn’t contain it. The impressions were terrible and Eddie told Richie just as much, but he still had to hide his face so that Richie couldn’t see how hard he was laughing.

Richie made jokes about wooing women with waggling eyebrows and threatened to learn to play the bagpipes after Eddie made a face every time he heard them. But every time something important happened Richie fell quiet, his expression the same as how Eddie felt - like he didn’t understand but he wanted to.

Richie stopped talking so much - still making jokes to Eddie every now and again, and still laughing far too loudly for the quiet theatre - but he mostly just slumped himself into Eddie’s side and watched carefully, the popcorn he’d bought long forgotten.

When it came to the scene after the play, when Eddie knew what was coming he reached out and grabbed Richie’s hand tightly, and didn’t complain when Richie squeezed back, even though it kind of hurt. Richie had gone very pale, shoulders drawn up to his ears and body stiff, biting his lip so hard Eddie saw blood burst beneath his teeth. He looked scared like Eddie had been, even though Eddie had thought being scared didn’t make sense. Eddie stayed quiet and kept hold of Richie’s hand until he relaxed, face finally breaking into a weak grin at the end when the students stood up on their desks.

When the credits rolled, all of the horror in Richie's face was gone as quickly as it came, and he grinned at Eddie, whooping out a cheer and springing out of his seat. He jumped up onto the armrest of Eddie's seat, trying to balance himself on the back as he yelled "O captain, my captain!" so loudly it echoed through the room, earning him plenty of glares. He reached his hand down to Eddie who shook his head vehemently but couldn't stop laughing as Richie got even louder and almost toppled backwards off the arm rest when someone came to usher them both out.

"You were right, Eds," Richie said, bumping his shoulder against Eddie's and making him stumble. "That was pretty good."

Richie was chewing on his thumbnail, his smile a little off, and Eddie wanted to ask if he was okay but knew he would lie anyway, so he just shoved Richie back, looking smug.

"I told you so," he crowed. "Maybe I should be the one to pick for movie nights from now on."

"No way, I'm still the expert," Richie argued, and Eddie rolled his eyes.

"Expert at being an asshole," he muttered, making Richie laugh in the way that made his whole face crinkle up.

Richie usually delighted in giving Eddie full, usually hour long reviews about a film they'd just seen, star rating and all, but this time he didn't. Eddie talked about it instead, like he had with Ben but a little more carefully, thinking a second longer than normal as Richie nodded along. Richie did the impressions again to make Eddie laugh, and both of them decided it got four out of five stars, but Richie's impressions of it only got two.

"I still think it would have been better with some zombies," Richie added definitively just before they parted ways, and Eddie kept laughing to himself all the way home.

Ben was waiting for Eddie just outside of the clubhouse the next day, holding tightly onto a book that he flipped over to show Eddie as he got closer.

“This is Walt Whitman, the poet they talked about in the movie,” Ben said. The book was black and small and looked brand new. “I thought you might like to read it.”

“Is it yours?” Eddie asked, cautiously taking the book from Ben.

Ben shook his head. “Library’s. It was the only one of his they had.”

Eddie frowned down at the book which was shiny and crisp, and when he opened it the spine creaked as if he was the first to do so.

“I’m the first person to check it out,” Ben explained when he noticed Eddie’s frown. “Surprisingly, not a lot of people in Derry like poetry,” he added wryly.

Both he and Ben sniggered at that, and Eddie flipped through the pages to see long columns of text printed neatly; nothing like the explosions of colour in Richie’s comics. It was almost daunting.

“My mom won’t like it if she catches me reading this,” Eddie mumbled, running his fingers gently down the pages.

“She doesn’t have to know. We can keep it in the clubhouse,” Ben suggested with an easy shrug, and Eddie looked up to grin at him.

“Thanks Ben.”

“Don’t thank me yet,” Ben laughed a little, pointing at the book. “You might hate it.”

*

Ben was right, Eddie hated the book. Or at least, he did at first. He tried to read it like one of his school books, starting at the first page and working through, but that just gave him a headache. There were just so many words, some words that he didn't even understand, and his mind kept skipping lines or repeating the same one over and over until the letters became all jumbled and blurred. At one point Eddie wondered if it would be easier with Richie there doing his stupid voices like he did when they read comics together, so he tried reading aloud instead. It helped for a while until Eddie reached a word that sounded like it didn't fit, and then he had to start all over again.

When he complained to Ben, Ben looked almost sympathetic.

"I know what you mean, but I think you're trying to read it like a book."

"It *is* a book," Eddie snapped, "how else am I supposed to read it?"

"I think you're meant to look for what means something to you," Ben said thoughtfully, completely ignoring Eddie's scowl. "You don't have to read all of it, just the parts you like."

The next time Eddie tackled the book, it was with one of Stan's highlighter pens in his hand. The book technically belonged to the library, but it hadn't been checked out since it was published in 1955, so Eddie figured no one would notice if he drew in it. Ben had told him to find parts he liked, and Eddie was almost determined to do that now as he sat himself on one of the rug on the clubhouse floor and began flicking through the pages.

When he was much younger, Eddie had used to want to know the answer to everything. Why the sky was blue and why flowers came in different colours and why people did what they did. His mother had quickly put the breaks on that, making him too scared to ask questions in case the answer was something he didn't like. She'd been proved right in some way when Eddie and his friends had started to ask questions about the children of Derry disappearing and almost paid for it with their lives, but strangely that had just left Eddie wanting to know even more, rather than less.

He wanted to understand why the boys in the film had been so inspired by the poems their teacher told them, wanted to feel the same as they did, or like Ben did - like they understood. Eddie stopped at one of the poems, before checking ahead to see where it ended and groaning to find that it took up more than fifty pages. Eddie remembered he'd liked the start of this one, but the words had gotten muddled far too quickly and he'd lost interest. This time he tried again, scanning through with his fingernail scraping across the page. He let his mind skip over words he didn't understand, letting them become white noise in the back of his mind rather than making his eyes struggle and ache.

I exist as I am, that is enough.

Eddie paused with a little huff of breath before highlighting that part, then he grabbed a pencil and underlined it too, for good measure.

This hour I tell things in confidence,

I might not tell everybody but I will tell you.

Another streak of yellow across that part. Eddie was left thinking of sleepovers when he and his friends found it so much easier to whisper secrets and mumble confessions into the dark where no one could see their faces. He thought of Richie half asleep beside him, admitting he was still so afraid but didn't want to be, and Eddie telling him that he felt the same.

By the time Eddie was done, there were chunks of yellow covering almost every page, sometimes just a word or two and sometimes a full verse. He grinned to himself, little bubbles of happiness rising in his chest and making the tips of his fingers tingle.

When Richie came clambering down the steps of the clubhouse Eddie jumped, slamming the book shut and pushing it out of view as if he'd been caught doing something wrong. Richie frowned down at the book tucked under Eddie's knees and nodded towards it.

"Checking out porn without me, Eds?" he asked, wagging his eyebrows and laughing when Eddie flipped him off.

“Shut up Richie, that’s gross,” Eddie muttered. Richie just shrugged, sitting himself down opposite Eddie, close enough that their feet were touching.

“School work, then? Why are you doing schoolwork? It’s a Saturday.”

“It’s not schoolwork,” Eddie sighed, he didn’t know why he was hiding it from Richie anyway - Richie wasn’t his mother, “It’s poetry. Remember the poet they talked about in the movie?”

Understanding dawned on Richie’s face as he stretched out his legs, one either side of Eddie’s body, ankles lining up with Eddie’s hips. “The Captain guy?”

“Walt Whitman,” Eddie confirmed with a nod. “Ben gave me one of his books.”

Richie hummed. “Isn’t it boring? I figured it was just a bunch of sappy poems about girls.”

“Some of them are boring,” Eddie conceded, making Richie snigger, “but not all of them are about girls. Listen -” Eddie started flipping through the pages to find what he was looking for, then started to read out loud.

“O Captain, my Captain,” Eddie saw Richie’s grin in the corner of his eye. Richie had been randomly shouting that line ever since they’d seen the movie, usually standing up and hollering it with a salute whenever Eddie walked into a room. “Our fearful trip is done. The ship has - uh, weathered every rack, the prize we s-sought is won.”

Eddie kept on reading, stuttering and wobbling his way through a few verses, and Richie leaned back on his hands, watching Eddie with an expression Eddie had never seen before. Eddie tried his best not to squirm under Richie’s stare, feeling his face heat up when he’d finished reading.

“Huh,” Richie grunted, face still unreadable. “That was weird, but cool.”

Richie smiled, and Eddie mirrored it, trying not to fidget too much as embarrassment prickled up his spine. Richie was always full of jokes

and making jabs at Eddie - or his mother - but Richie was never mean about it. They'd all had enough hateful words from Bowers and his gang to last a lifetime, and Eddie knew that Richie never made jokes to be mean, he only ever did it to make his friends laugh. Still, it surprised Eddie when Richie didn't crack a joke, but instead ducked his head and pushed his glasses up his nose before he spoke again.

"Can you read another one?" he asked, voice unnaturally quiet.

Eddie's stomach did a weird kind of backflip, but he nodded anyway, suddenly glad he'd dog-eared pages with his favourite poems on that he'd thought Richie might just like too.

Eddie read and Richie listened, more still than Eddie had ever seen him, and Eddie thought that he was maybe starting to understand why other people liked poetry so much.

*

For his birthday that month, each of his friends got him a poetry book. It was all Ben and Richie's idea - Richie who suggested it and Ben who instructed them all on which books to get - and Eddie, embarrassingly, almost cried. He shouldn't have been surprised, because these were his friends, his chosen family who knew him best and loved him the most. But it was still overwhelming to know that they'd given Eddie something that was just *his*, opening up his world in a way his mother had never allowed.

Stan had read through his book before he'd given it to Eddie wrapped neatly in a bow, and had marked pages with poems he thought Eddie might like best. Bill had drawn down the columns of the book he gave, filled it with colour and sketches of flowers and trees and birds so that the walls of neatly printed text didn't look quite as daunting. Bev had gotten him a bunch of pixy stix and hidden them in between the pages, and Mike's included a mixtape of songs he'd thought Eddie might like, too. Ben was the only one who didn't get a poetry book after instructing the others what to get. He instead got Eddie a VHS

copy of Dead Poets Society, but swapped the box with his Ghostbusters one so that his mother wouldn't know what was inside.

Richie barely hiding his laughter when he gave Eddie his poetry book, and Eddie groaned, smacking him on the head with the book when he'd read who it was by.

“You’re so fucking immature, Richie!”

“Oh come on, Eds, he’s called *Cummings*. That’s hilarious, even Stan found it funny,” Richie was laughing hysterically now, and Stan shrugged beside him.

“It *is* a stupid name,” Stan reasoned, mouth quirking up.

Eddie was trying to keep the facade of scowling and rolling his eyes at Richie being ridiculous, but he was desperately choking on laughter. When Bill spluttered out a giggle was when Eddie finally cracked, and Richie was ecstatic.

“I got you this too, so your mom won’t find your secret stash,” Richie said with a wink, pushing over something wrapped in newspaper.

It was a little maroon satchel, like one Eddie had seen Mr Denbrough holding when he rushed out to work on days they’d slept over at Bills. It had a little golden lock on the flap, and Richie had a key to match in his palm that had been fastened to a cord.

“It’s easier to hide, and she’ll never be able to look in it anyway,” Richie explained, shrugging as he handed Eddie the key.

There were already things inside the bag when Eddie opened it, a few comics and boxes of Razzles, as well as a brand new pack of highlighter pens, and plenty of tokens for the arcade scattered into the bottom.

All of the books his friends had given him fit in perfectly, the lock snapping shut easily, and Eddie stuffed the key in his pocket before turning to grin at all of his friends in turn. He loved them all so much it hurt, but knowing they loved him back just as much made him feel like he was invincible. He didn’t care that he’d have to hurry home soon and pretend to like the new pairs of socks and itchy wooly

jumper his mother would no doubt gift him, because he had this. He hugged the bag close to his chest and thanked them all, still grinning.

“Just think of all the porn you could hide in there,” Richie crowed, breaking the moment and making them all groan.

It wasn’t Eddie’s real birthday yet. His mother would never let him leave the house on his *actual* birthday, preferring to make the day her own private shrine to the son she thought she had. But the Losers knew that, so had picked their own date to celebrate Eddie’s birthday every year since he was eleven, when their seven had been just four. Eddie loved that day much more, so much so that he’d started telling people his birthday was the day the Losers had chosen, instead.

The clubhouse was cold now that winter was setting in, their breaths fogging up when they spoke and frost settling on the wooden beams. For Richie and Bev’s birthdays in the summer they’d sprawl outside of the clubhouse in the lush green grass and exchange gifts in the sun, but Eddie was born right in between fall and winter, so his birthdays were spent somewhere warmer.

Eddie missed summer days, missed paddling around in the quarry and traipsing through the woodland searching for treasure or racing their bikes down empty roads. Their summer just gone had been robbed of them by the clown, so it had passed in a blur of fear and dark sewers rather than the warm happiness Eddie always associated with summer and his friends.

This was their last summer together, since by Christmas half of them would be gone and far away from Derry. Eddie’s mother had decided they were moving when Eddie had come home after being missing for almost a full day, shaken and covered in grime that he couldn’t explain to her. She’d screamed and cried for hours, dragging him into the hospital for test after test, before screaming some more about how she needed to get Eddie out of this town and away from his terrible friends.

Despite Eddie experiencing the worst of Derry firsthand, he still didn’t want to leave.

Richie nudged into Eddie’s shoulder then, knocking him out of his

thoughts.

“Whatcha thinkin’ bout, guv’nor?” he asked, and Eddie rolled his eyes, fighting a smile.

“How terrible your British Guy is,” Eddie retorted, and Richie laughed loudly, delighted.

“You love it, Eds,” said Richie, undeterred as ever.

And Eddie did. He loved all of his friends and the special day they’d made just for him, and he loved all of the summers they’d gotten to spend together. Eddie wanted to write a letter to tell himself how much these people mattered to him, just in case he ever forgot. They had helped him grow into the person he was, had let him grow away from the person his mother thought he should be.

Stan and Bill were bickering over who had gotten Eddie the best poetry book as Mike and Bev danced along to the mixtape Mike had made, trying to coerce Ben into joining them, and he looked very close to joining in even though Eddie knew he hated dancing.

He missed them all already, before they’d even gone.

“Seriously, Eds, why do you look so glum? It’s meant to be your birthday,” Richie pressed, bumping his head against Eddie’s shoulder like a needy cat. Eddie would never tell him, but he’d miss Richie the most when he left. Eddie’s world would be so much quieter without Richie’s dumb jokes and loud crowing laughter.

“We’re running out of time,” Eddie blurted, then shook his head. “I mean, I’ll be leaving soon, and so will Bill and Stan and Bev. It’s weird.” Weird because it felt so wrong, weird because Eddie desperately wished it wasn’t happening.

Richie hummed, before giving Eddie his brightest smile - the one that made Eddie’s knees ache, for some reason - before bumping his head against Eddie’s shoulder once more.

“You don’t need to worry your pretty little head ‘bout that, old chap,” he said, the British guy making a short reappearance. “We’ve got plenty of time, I promise.”

“Yeah?” Eddie prompted. Richie always sounded so certain of everything, so solid and sure, and Eddie needed that right now, when it felt like the floor underneath him was crumbling into nothing.

“Yup! The Losers aren’t dead yet,” Richie said, flopping down on his back and beaming at Eddie, reaching up to pat Eddie’s cheek and laughing when Eddie batted his hand away. “No one’s going anywhere ‘till the fat lady sings.”

“Who’s the fa-” Eddie started, then he stopped face darkening as he realised, but Richie was already vibrating with laughter. Eddie dug his fingers into Richie’s stomach until Richie curled up around him and retaliated with hands locking around Eddie’s wrists. It quickly unravelled into a full blown wrestling match, lanky limbs tangling up between gasped laughter and red faces, and Eddie quickly forgot what he had been worried about as Richie’s squawking laughter filled up his head instead.

*

They didn’t have nearly as much time as Richie had promised. A few months later, right as winter was really sinking its teeth in, Eddie and his mother left Derry to move to North Carolina so that his mother could be closer to her sisters. Eddie had already said goodbye to Bill, who’d moved just after Eddie’s birthday, and then Beverly who was gone soon after, followed by Stan. It was only Ben, Mike, and Richie left, and he knew they were all grieving for their fractured little group just as much as he was.

Eddie’s mother had found his bag full of poetry a few weeks ago, had split the seams of the bag with a kitchen knife to look inside, and then threw all of his books in the garbage. She’d told him it was for his own good, like she did with most things, and told him those books would poison his mind eventually and drive him insane, disgust clear on her face.

“We don’t keep secrets in this house, Eddie-bear,” she’d crooned after she finished shouting, voice far too sweet as she shoved the last book in the trash. Eddie was left with his torn up satchel in his hands as he shook with anger, eyes burning.

He was lucky he’d kept his notebook separate, the one he’d used to scribble down his favourite poems to keep. It was mostly random verses or lines scrawled out sideways on the page with words spelt wrong and ink smudged by his hand, but at least he got to keep *something* hidden from his mother.

Richie cried when they said goodbye, just a few tears escaping when he didn’t blink them back quick enough. Eddie had only ever seen Richie cry a handful of times, and three of those times had been in the past few weeks when they’d had to say goodbye to their other friends the same as he, Ben, and Mike were saying goodbye to Eddie now. Eddie pulled Richie into a half hug and made a joke about Richie getting snot on his shoulder, feeling pleased when he coaxed a laugh from him. Eddie cried too, big angry tears running down his face with his hands balled into fists at his sides. He was mad at his mother, at his friends who’d already left, at the world for making things turn out this way.

Richie did his best to distract Eddie, acting like it was just another day, like they had all the time in the world.

“I bet you’ll still be a midget next time we see ya, Eds,” Richie said, voice too cheerfully loud to be genuine. Eddie elbowed him in the ribs anyway, scowling.

“Fu - uh, screw you, dude,” Eddie shot back, eyeing where his mother was stood, pretending to pack up the car but clearly eavesdropping. Richie sniggered, catching Eddie’s almost slip up.

“I wonder who will be the tallest,” Mike mused. He had a hand on Eddie’s shoulder as they stood in a loose circle talking, and Eddie was grateful for it despite his mother’s glares.

“Definitely Richie,” Ben said, and Eddie nodded.

“His mom is sick of buying him new clothes because he wont stop

growing,” Eddie added, nodding over to Richie. Most of his shirts were just a little too short at his wrists, and he had to roll his pants up now to make the fact they barely reached his ankles look like a fashion statement rather than just that his mother refused to buy him new pants every few months.

“Eddie’s just jealous. I’m gonna be a giant but he’ll always be an adorable little smurf,” Richie said, stretching his arms up high before curling up with a grunt when Eddie stepped forward to shove at him.

“I’d rather be this size than a freak of nature, asshole,” Eddie muttered, but the insult was weakened by the fact both he and Richie were grinning at each other.

His mother could only hold her patience for so long. She’d allowed Eddie extra time because he was still raw from her throwing out his books, but her kindness only really stretched out for a few extra minutes, and it wasn’t long until she was calling for Eddie to get in the car.

Eddie hugged each of his remaining friends, clunky cast getting in the way so that he had to give one armed hugs with his injured one sticking out to the side. Mike patted his back heartily, Ben squeezed gently but firmly, and Richie curled himself around Eddie far too briefly before backing off with a wobbly smile. It was a ghost of the hug Eddie really wanted, a barely there embrace that made Eddie stagger forward and almost ask Richie if they could try again and really mean it this time.

But he didn’t, instead he waved at his friends and gave them a big smile, before he threw himself into the car with a golf ball sized lump lodged in his throat. He could see Richie jumping around in the rear view mirror, waving his hands around wildly with Ben and Mike beside him waving too. Eddie knew he’d see them all again - couldn’t go a whole lifetime without ever seeing them again - but he crossed his fingers and hoped it would be sooner rather than later.

Leaving them felt wrong, and before he’d even lost sight of them, he missed them already.

When they’d gotten almost an hour away from Derry’s city limits,

Eddie became so dizzy that he had to ask his mother to stop the car so that he could jump out and vomit on the sidewalk, head swimming and hands shaking. His stomach was doing a full gymnastics routine and noise was rushing through his head like a wind tunnel. Everything inside of him ached but Eddie had no idea why.

“I wanna go home,” he moaned to his mother, who was passing him a bottle of water and insisting he should swallow down almost a full pack of travel sickness pills.

“We’ll be there in a couple of days, Eddie bear,” his mother cooed, pushing the hair away from his clammy face. She began to tell him all about their new little apartment that his aunts had picked out for them, promising that Eddie could decorate his room however he wanted. South Carolina didn’t sound or feel like home, but Eddie was far too exhausted to argue.

He climbed back into the car, head still swimming as he rested his temple against the cool of the window and tried to breathe slowly. He shut his eyes, blocking out his mother’s anxious rambling, and he dreamt of summer.

*

Twenty-seven years later.

The old cliché saying that life was too short was scarily true, and before Eddie knew it he was pushing forty and had nothing to show for it. He’d spent a lot of his life doing what other people expected of him, and though he wasn’t exactly sad, he couldn’t say that he was happy, either.

When Mike’s call came, telling him that he needed to come back home to Derry, Eddie had felt a lot of things, but the strangest thing he’d felt had been relief. He had been divorced for a year now - almost to the day - he lived alone, his mother long dead and no

friends to speak of since he worked long hours by choice. He didn't remember much at first, just ghosts of the past coming up and bringing snippets of memories with them, little soundbites of laughter or snapshots of lazy days at the quarry. The relief came when Eddie finally understood that the piece of himself he'd always thought was missing was actually *seven* pieces, each part a friend he'd lost but never completely forgotten.

When Eddie got to the restaurant and he and his friends settled back into their old ways so easily, he realised just how much of himself had been lost along with the memories. He'd worked so hard to build up parts of himself as a child, parts that were just his and not his mother's, and he'd had that robbed from him along with his favourite people in the world. He mourned a little bit for the child he used to be, proud of how brave he'd been, then, and wondered if his friends felt the same.

He fell back into his bickering routine with Richie, too, almost like a reflex, but as he sunk further into it he realised the feeling of how *right* it was to him was almost overwhelming. His memories of Richie were all bright laughter and knobbly elbows digging into each other sides along with nights pressed up close pretending to read comics but mostly just sneaking looks at each other.

He found himself thinking of his ex-wife, Myra, then, and how they cared for each other as well as they were able but always ran as parallel lines that could never touch. He and Richie had been the opposite - colliding with each other at any opportunity. How Eddie had felt, and still felt about Richie was everything people say love should be; he'd just been too young and too scared to understand it, before. Now he was older, but he was still just as scared, feeling more than he had in years and not knowing what to do with it all.

When someone mentioned the clown, all of those feelings were quickly wiped away and replaced with a dread so strong Eddie felt he might disintegrate on the spot and melt right into the floor. He wanted to run away and hide somewhere, curl up into a ball and wait for the storm to pass. He wanted to stomp his feet like a toddler and yell that it wasn't fair, that he'd just got his friends back, couldn't they have some time together before marching to their deaths?

Richie reached out to him then, fingers curling around Eddie's wrist and holding on whilst chaos erupted in the restaurant, and Eddie's heart felt like it was going to explode. Eddie wanted to get past this and see what was on the other side, and he supposed he was going to have to push himself through to get there. Eddie wriggled his arm from Richie's grasp so that he could hold Richie's hand instead, tangling their fingers together, and a memory flashed by then of them huddled up together in a movie theatre, the screen illuminating Richie's face.

"Fuck," Richie muttered, rubbing his free hand over his face after the bewildered waitress had left to get their check. "I don't think I can go through this again."

Eddie wasn't sure if he was talking about the clown, or the memories, or just Derry in general, but he wholeheartedly agreed regardless.

Going through it all again was just as hard. Maybe even harder, considering their creaking bodies and the fact they were still trying desperately to catch up on twenty seven years of lost time. Somehow, though, they managed to beat that fucking clown - *again* - and made it out of there alive, all seven of them. This time was a closer call than the last, too close for a few of them.

Eddie didn't remember much, really, just a rush of noise at a too high volume, the place switching between blinding lights and an oppressing darkness. He remembered the stone cold fear he hadn't felt since he was a child rushing back to him, followed by the boiling fury he'd felt back then, too. He remembered Richie, limp and slack jawed in the deadlights and he remembered thinking *please don't let me lose him again, not when I've just got him back*, before he hurled a fence post into It's mouth.

Richie had blinked awake in a daze with Eddie hovering over him, and Eddie had opened his mouth to say something that had been on the tip of his tongue since he was fifteen years old.

"Rich, I need to - I mean, you know I-" he'd started, but Richie had interrupted by trying desperately to haul Eddie out of harm's way when Pennywise came towering over them, a razor sharp arm raised up above their bodies.

It skewered through Eddie's shoulder instead of his torso, the sickening rip of Eddie's skin and muscle deafening despite all of the noise going on around them. The pain took a few seconds to register, but when it did Eddie felt like his whole body was on fire.

Richie was there with his jacket bunched up and pressed against Eddie's shoulder, babbling with shaking hands and Eddie's blood spattered across his face. "Tell me later, ok? When we get out of this alive, tell me then," he'd said, face pale and desperate, and Eddie wanted to make damn sure he did.

They'd fought and they won, but only just.

Eddie didn't remember leaving Neibolt, and he didn't remember the trip to the hospital either. He'd slipped in and out of dreams; some were good, filled with sun soaked days and bright laughter, and Eddie tried to hold onto those as long as he could. But there were bad ones, too, of Eddie watching his friends retreat from Neibolt without him, leaving him cold and alone, slumped up against the wall.

He would've rather stayed sleeping, even with the nightmares, because when he woke up the pain was unbearable. It took over his whole body and even managed to fight through the morphine induced fog in his brain, replacing it with agony that almost made him wish he were dead.

A voice cut through all of that, wobbly and unsure but definitely there. Eddie couldn't focus enough to hear everything but he followed the sound anyway, clinging onto it.

"The doctors said I should, uh, talk to you. Said you could hear me and - shit - I don't know what to fuckin' say," it was Richie, Eddie would know that voice anywhere. Even though it wasn't the squawking teenage voice from all of his fondest childhood memories, it was still undeniably Richie.

"I remembered you used to love poetry, and I don't know if you still do but, well, I saw a book of poems in the little store downstairs and I bought it."

Eddie knew he couldn't answer, and he was too tired to even think of

what he would answer if he could, so instead he just listened.

“It’s not your pal Walt, but I hope it’s good enough to make you happy. Or maybe bad enough that you’ll wake up just to tell me to shut the fuck up, that’s fine too.” Richie chuckled a little at his own joke, and Eddie so badly wanted to roll his eyes at him.

Richie started to read, voice croaking as he clumsily read through the verses. He was terrible at it, unsure and uncomfortable but Eddie loved it anyway. He clung onto every word Richie said, and Richie kept on reading, sometimes stopping to make comments about certain parts or snorting a laugh at some word that sounded dirty, and Eddie kept on listening.

He didn’t know how much time passed but he knew it had been a while. Richie was still reading, though now his voice was hoarse and thick with sleep and Eddie wanted to tell him to *stop and rest, dipshit, you’ll give yourself laryngitis*, but he was still overwhelmed with the heavy darkness that was trying to drag him down.

Days passed and soon Eddie started to be aware of more than just Richie’s voice. He could hear people - his friends - talking softly around him, and hear the incessant beeping of the monitor and smell the disinfectant in his room. He thought he could almost see the bright hospital lights behind his closed eyelids, and thought he felt Richie’s hand in his own.

When Eddie finally came around his mouth felt like it was filled with sawdust and everything hurt so badly it made him feel sick. But even still, he was so glad to be awake and away from the dark that had been so desperate to swallow him whole.

Richie cried, head dropping onto Eddie’s shoulder. Eddie was reminded of the day he left Derry, so made a joke about Richie getting snot all over him like he had back then. Unlike back then Richie hugged Eddie properly this time - carefully, gently, but with feeling - and Eddie hugged him back, fist bunched up in his shirt.

It was over two decades later, but they finally got to try again; got their second chance.

*

A few months after.

Eddie had never really believed the whole *carpe diem* bullshit. He figured it was a saying for adrenaline junkies who thought skydiving was a good hobby, or at least for people that had some sort of goal in life. Eddie's idea of a life goal was finally getting a NutriBullet for his morning smoothies, so it was pretty clear to him that seizing the day wasn't exactly his style.

But he'd misunderstood, because seizing the day didn't mean doing something drastic. It just meant something like finally buckling up and telling your best friend that you wanted to spend the rest of your life with him, in whatever way he wanted. It meant leaning forward and daring to kiss him after a hug that had been too long and too intense to be just friendly.

It meant letting yourself be happy, and every day finding little pockets of joy to bask in.

Eddie's version of joy was found in an apartment that felt like a home, with Richie's head heavy in his lap and the sunlight streaming through the windows. Even the dust motes trapped in the rays didn't bother Eddie much, though he did make a mental note to try and coerce Richie into deep cleaning sometime soon.

Richie hummed as Eddie began combing his fingers through his hair. "Do you remember how you used to read poems to me when we were kids?" he asked, and Eddie snorted.

"Barely," he admitted. "I remember you reading to me though, in the hospital."

He didn't miss how Richie flushed ever so slightly. They'd barely talked about it, the whole thing feeling too weighted and too tense to

bring forward. Eddie wanted to thank Richie for it, but he wasn't sure how.

"You remember that because it was only a few months ago. You losing your memory, old man?" Richie teased, grinning up at Eddie before yelping a little when Eddie tugged on his hair.

"I *remember* because it was important, asshole," Eddie corrected. "You- well, it helped, is all."

In between all of the darkness and the pain and terrifying nightmares, Richie's voice had been an anchor that Eddie could tether himself to. It was all he remembered now, everything else forgotten other than Richie stumbling his way through verses of poetry whilst he clung on tight to Eddie's hand.

Richie reached his arm up so he could grab Eddie's free hand, and he began rubbing his thumbs over his knuckles gently.

"You used to love reading poetry, you and Ben traded books like drugs," Richie sniggered, before softening a little. "Do you still like it? Or was I boring you to death reciting that shit for no reason?"

Eddie snorted at the poor choice of words, squeezing Richie's hand reassuringly when he cringed as he realised what he'd said too late. He squeezed Richie's hand a couple more times after too, reminding Richie that he was still here and still alive, and Richie let out a breath, smiling a little.

He'd forgotten he loved poetry for a while - not as long as he'd forgotten other things - but most of his old belongings from Derry, including his favourite poems, had been left gathering dust. Eddie remembered when he and Myra had split he had only took a boxful of things with him to his new pokey apartment, deciding he wanted to leave as much as he could behind. At the top of the box was a sketchbook filled with poems he'd written down - the one thing he'd managed to keep safe from his mother - and Eddie had spent his first night alone in ten years reading through it, smiling to himself.

"I still love it," Eddie admitted. Poetry was something that was his, not that his mother had told him to love or something he loved

because of his friends. It was a strange thing to be proud of, but he was proud anyway.

“Can you tell me one of your favourites?” Richie requested softly, shutting his eyes.

There weren’t many Eddie knew off by heart, but it wasn’t like Richie would know if he got it wrong anyway. He’d never cared when they were kids and Eddie fumbled his way over words too big for his young mouth, and Eddie knew he wouldn’t care now. There was one he’d read and loved more recently that he hadn’t remembered as a child, though he supposed he wouldn’t. The younger version of himself would balk at any mention of love, and the older version was still figuring out how to unlearn that reflex.

“I like my body when it is with your body,” Eddie started, voice so quiet he was almost whispering. “It is so quite new a thing.”

Eddie moved his hand out of Richie’s hair and traced Richie’s face instead, drawing his finger down the bridge of his nose, then moving to the corner of his mouth, trailing down to his jawline.

“Muscles better and nerves more. I like your body, I like what it does - *shut up*,” Eddie cut himself off to flick Richie’s nose when he saw him open his eyes and give Eddie a sly look that meant he was definitely about to make a joke.

Richie sighed but shut his mouth, and after one more warning look, Eddie kept going. “I like to feel the spine of your body and its bones, and the trembling firm-smooth ness and which I will again and again and again kiss, i like kissing this and that of you.” Embarrassment was heating up Eddie’s face and making his chest tighten, but he tried to ignore it. This made him feel far too raw and open, and he wasn’t sure whether the feeling was something he enjoyed or not. Richie turned himself in Eddie’s lap to mush his face into Eddie’s stomach, and Eddie felt him press a kiss there.

Eddie moved his hand to Richie’s back, rubbing his palm in circles between his shoulder blades, before running his fingers along the notches of Richie’s spine.

“I like slowly stroking the shocking fuzz of your electric fur, and what is it comes over parting flesh. And eyes big love-crumbs-” Richie barked a laugh at that, the sound muffled against Eddie’s shirt.

“What the hell are *love crumbs*?” he asked, turning back over to face Eddie.

Eddie laughed along with him, shaking his head. “I don’t know. Maybe it means the fucking bagel crumbs you keep leaving in our bed.”

Richie laughed even louder at that, reaching up to prod at Eddie’s cheek. “How do you stand sleeping in the same bed as a slob like me?”

“I haven’t got a choice,” he grumbled, trying his best to keep his frown despite Richie’s grin making more laughter bubble up in his throat. “The guest room bed just isn’t as comfortable.”

“The sacrifices you make for love,” Richie sighed wistfully. Even though it was a joke something tugged in Eddie’s chest, and he couldn’t help but lean down then to kiss Richie’s forehead, making him hum happily.

“Speaking of sacrifices, it’s your turn to do the dishes,” Eddie said, and Richie groaned, throwing an arm over his eyes.

“Can’t we just stay here for a while longer?” Richie pleaded. “I promise I’ll do it later.”

“You always promise that and you never do,” Eddie grumbled, but he didn’t push it. Instead he settled his hand into Richie’s hair again, leaning his head back against the couch and shutting his eyes.

He’d bother Richie to do the dishes later, when this moment had passed after Eddie’s legs would no doubt go numb from having Richie resting on them for so long, and Richie would start to complain about the crick in his neck. But for now they had time, more time than Eddie ever thought he’d be allowed; not borrowed time but something that they’d both earned.

“Can I get another poem, Walt?” Richie asked, taking his arm away

from his face and sniggering when Eddie rolled his eyes.

Eddie started reciting another, and Richie's face looked exactly the same as the few times they done this as kids, soft and open and a little bit awestruck. They were older now, all grown up and rough around the edges, but Eddie still felt the same, he just understood the feeling more now, and he let himself feel it.

Eddie knew love, and he wasn't scared of it like he had been as a child. He knew what he and Richie had gone through to get here, and figured they deserved their own path together now, one that wasn't filled with horror or pain. It wouldn't be a beautiful poem, or even softly written words that would last forever, but it was real and it was theirs for as long as they could keep it, and Eddie figured that was better than any poem he'd ever find.

Author's Note:

If you're one of the people who've been reading a stitch away - I promise I haven't abandoned it. I have the next chapter written up, it just needs proof reading and polishing a little. It's just about 20k words too so hopefully will be worth the wait!

The specific poems mentioned in here are Song of Myself and O Captain! My Captain! by Walt Whitman, and I Like My Body When It Is With Your by E. E. Cummings. [Here's](#) a little doc with a few more poems Lyds found that we thought fit Eddie pretty well, if you're interested.

And you can find me on [tumblr](#), if you'd like
thanks for reading <3